

GAMES

FAQ

Q Will Windows Vista make my games look better or run quicker?

A DirectX is the part of Windows that assures compatibility between PC hardware and games. Windows Vista comes with the much-hyped DirectX 10. This supports more advanced graphical effects than the current DirectX 9.0c. These include geometry shaders that can quickly generate large numbers of identical 3D objects such as grass or snowflakes. However, you'll need DirectX 10 games and an expensive new graphics card to experience these enhanced effects; see our review of the Asus EN8800GTS in *What's New: Components, Shopper* March 2007.

Windows Vista also includes DirectX 9.0Ex, a tweaked version of DirectX 9.0c that makes Windows Vista backward-compatible with older DirectX games. However, some games, such as Doom 3, use OpenGL instead of DirectX. There are some problems at present with running OpenGL titles, though these are likely to be fixed by updated drivers in the near future. So while your old games won't run any faster or look any better, most of them should at least work as they did before.

Seth Barton

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THQ

Supreme Commander

★★★★★

£25 inc VAT



Supreme Commander is the sequel in all but name to the popular 1997 real-time strategy (RTS) title Total Annihilation. The paper-thin plot sees three factions locked in an intergalactic war. To follow, then, here are three campaigns of linearly plotted missions, plus the usual online multiplayer modes.

The game plays a lot like a standard RTS title. You mine resources from the landscape, build a wide range of land, air and naval units, and use them to eradicate your opponents. However, Supreme Commander does all this on a scale never before seen in an RTS. The biggest levels measure a gigantic 81km across. To put this in perspective, it would take your huge armoured commander unit about 40 minutes to run across this size map.

All that space is just begging to be filled with huge armies of robotic killing machines. The three factions each have their own set of units, the biggest of which dwarf the standard units. For example, the conventional-looking United Earth Federation can deploy a huge mobile tank factory, while the high-tech Cybrans can create a gigantic spider-bot that crushes lesser units beneath its feet.

However powerful your robotic lackeys may be, it's your frail human brain that must organise and deploy them effectively. This is no easy task when there are hundreds of units on each side, fighting on numerous battlefronts simultaneously. Hardware requirements are high, too, and therefore we would recommend a fast processor to keep it all running smoothly. There's even dual monitor support to help keep an eye on everything. DirectX 10 support will be available in March for



▲ You'll need a supreme brain to keep track of events on the huge battlefields of Supreme Commander

those who have Windows Vista and compatible graphics cards.

The mouse scroll wheel is essential, allowing you to zoom out rapidly from a detailed unit to an overview of the whole battlefield. From this vantage point, all the units are replaced by icons, so you can interpret the flow of the battle and send reinforcements where needed. The rest of the interface is easy to get to grips with, and once mastered becomes a powerful tool. Setting patrol routes, organising build queues and airlifting ground units are possible without much fuss.

We occasionally found the single-player game tested our patience too much, with some missions feeling more like a chore than a challenge. In particular, you can often find that your opponent is so well defended by gun turrets and shields that it takes a long time to defeat them. However, defeating a

similarly skilled online opponent is always a thrill.

For those with the time to spare, Supreme Commander lifts the traditional RTS to a new level without actually reinventing it. The added space allows for more strategic manoeuvring and the huge battles are genuinely awe-inspiring experiences.

Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ War on a huge scale
- ✓ Great control interface
- ✗ Long and tiring conflicts

STRATEGY GAME Requires Windows XP, 1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 8GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE B000FNA2QY
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.supremecommander.com

Top 5 games

1. Warhammer 40K: Dark Crusade £25 inc VAT ★★★★★



An excellent standalone expansion to the popular Dawn of War, with seven armies to command. The graphics look great, while battles are quick and brutal.

SUPPLIER www.play.com DETAILS www.dow-darkcrusade.com FULL REVIEW Feb 2007

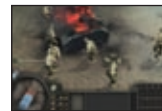


2. Company of Heroes £18 inc VAT ★★★★★



This game looks fantastic, from the historically accurate units to the bombed-out French towns. But it's the innovative gameplay that makes it the best RTS around.

SUPPLIER www.play.com DETAILS www.thq.com FULL REVIEW Jan 2007



3. FIFA 2007 £20 inc VAT ★★★★★



The fully licensed teams and slick presentation have always been welcome, but FIFA 2007 is easier to play than its predecessor. Arguably, the best football game around.

SUPPLIER www.gameplay.com DETAILS http://fifa07.ea.com FULL REVIEW Jan 2007



4. FlatOut 2 £15 inc VAT ★★★★★



FlatOut 2 has the most outrageous crashes in it that let you send your driver through the windscreens and into the road. It's also a brilliant racing game.

SUPPLIER www.play.com DETAILS www.flatoutgame.com FULL REVIEW Oct 2006



5. The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion £13 inc VAT ★★★★★



The most stunning role-playing game we've ever played. Graphics are amazing, and there's so much to it you could play it for a month and still have loads left to do.

SUPPLIER www.gameplay.com DETAILS www.elderscrolls.com FULL REVIEW Jul 2006





▲ Just a fraction of the buildings you'll need to keep the Denarii rolling in

SIERRA
Caesar IV

★★★★

£17 inc VAT

Ancient Rome never goes out of fashion. It has been nine years since Caesar III helped establish the PC as the thinking person's gaming platform, but its return is definitely welcome. A reasonably pretty 3D engine aside, the Caesar games' essence has barely changed for this fourth instalment. But despite that lack of adventurous design, it's still a compelling city-management experience.

Your task is to gradually transform tracts of empty countryside into bustling economic powerhouses. For that, you need people. To attract people, you need houses and work. To create work, you need to build farms, factories and, as a classier breed of Roman starts sniffing around, shops, schools and theatres. Then there's water supply, health, policing, trade, tribute to Rome and army building to keep in mind. It's an incredible amount to keep under control, but rather than being daunting it's engrossing and satisfyingly deep.

Sadly, such fine micro-management is hamstrung by an awful interface. Sprawling menus obscure the screen so much you can often barely see what you're doing, sometimes to the point where there isn't room to place a building where you want it. It's very frustrating, and undermines the feeling of leisurely omnipotence the game is supposed to provide.

Another misfire is the crude combat, because it's so out of keeping with the rest of the game, feels token at best and silly at worst. If you crave Caesarian combat, Rome: Total War is the game to choose, while less-violent historical itches are best scratched with the very different but brilliant Civilization IV.

Nevertheless, a worthwhile game still lurks beneath the sloppy controls. Old as it is, the Caesar formula remains one to which it's easy to lose dozens of hours, making it a real shame that this time around it feels a bit rushed and short on new elements.

Alec Meer

SUMMARY

- ✓ The return of a true classic
- ✓ Thoughtful and complex
- ✗ Terrible presentation

MANAGEMENT GAME Requires Windows 2000/XP, 1.6GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, 2GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE B000H61OP2
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.caesariv.com



▲ In the Need for Speed: Carbon, building a great-looking car is more fun than racing it

EA
Need for
Speed: Carbon

★★★★

£30 inc VAT

If you've been awaiting your next fix of high-octane street racing, Need for Speed: Carbon will be a welcome sight. Not much has changed since the last game. In some respects that's a good thing; the slick presentation we've come to expect is still present and correct. Video sequences blend smoothly into the action and the pumping soundtrack sets the pulse racing.

Once you delve deeper, though, flaws appear. Playing NFS: Carbon requires you to win races set around samey city streets, soup up your vehicle with the proceeds and repeat until you've won enough races to challenge the big boss. The city is split into four areas, so you have to repeat this process four times; it gets boring after the first couple. Never mind that the cars handle like a cross between a dodgem and a shopping trolley with an afterburner tacked on its rear.

One new feature is the Canyon Duel showdown with the bosses. The aim is to skid your way down a twisty mountain road without plummeting off the side and without being overtaken by the boss. It sounds great, but it's not very challenging. The addition of team-mates is another lukewarm idea. The idea is that they give bonuses, show you short cuts or put off your opponents. In reality, they get in your way and win races you would have been capable of winning yourself.

The new Autosculpt feature is excellent. Everything you bolt on to your car can be stretched and resculpted to your specification. Once you've created your automotive labour of love, you can show it off online in the Pursuit Tag and Pursuit Knockout modes.

Need for Speed: Carbon is a bit of an enigma. To combine illegal street racing, suicidal high-speed drifting and attractive women and still not be anything more than average is an incredible feat.

Sasha Muller

SUMMARY

- ✓ Autosculpt feature is a great addition
- ✗ Unimaginative gameplay
- ✗ Not very challenging

RACING GAME Requires Windows 2000/XP, 1.7GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 4.7GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE B000HG1GXW
SUPPLIER www.game.co.uk
DETAILS www.ea.com/nfs/carbon



▲ Colorelli is a great combination of a game and painting package for your kids

WACOM
Colorelli

★★★★★

£30 inc VAT



Kids love drawing and painting and they love computer games, too, so Wacom's Colorelli is a great idea. It's a computer game that's entirely controlled using the included pen and tablet. It's easy to get running with clear instructions on how to install both the pen and software.

The plot revolves around the evil Dr Grey, who is trying to steal all the colour from the world of Colorelli. The gameplay mainly consists of creative and artistic tasks to complete as well as more traditional coordination-based activities.

To start, you have to choose a car, which lets you drive around the city of Colorelli visiting its various colourful characters. The graphics are bright, stylish and colourful. Just driving about is fun to begin with. Visiting the characters advances the plot, and each one has a mini-game that you can play when you visit.

Early on in the game, you're directed to draw a picture for the gallery. Colorelli integrates a fully featured but accessible art package into its game world. You can draw and paint with a variety of pens and brushes, and cut out and make montages of your creations. A wide range of tools is available, and you can earn new ones by completing various tasks, plus there's clip art and outlines to colour in.

The games characters look great, but have heavily accented voices. The giraffe gallery owner is French, while the octopus painter is Italian. Younger kids could find them hard to understand and get confused about where to go next.

Even once the game is complete, the art package keeps on giving. Once your child outgrows Colorelli, they can use the pen and tablet with more complicated software such as ArtRage. This is a well-thought-out package, and a good way to introduce your kids to the PC as a creative tool.

Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Includes pen and tablet
- ✓ Well-featured art package
- ✗ Smaller children will need help

CHILD'S ART GAME Requires Windows 2000/XP, 1.2GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 2GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE FT-0405U10-EN
SUPPLIER www.pcworld.co.uk
DETAILS www.colorelli.eu